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TAGS: PINS MOPS PGOV ECON IZ
SUBJECT: SONS OF IRAQ (SOI) PROGRAM UPDATE

REF: A. BAGHDAD 164
     ¶B. BAGHDAD 4205 (2007)
     ¶C. BAGHDAD 1005
     ¶D. BAGHDAD CLASSIFIED O/I JULY 28
     ¶E. BAGHDAD 2330

Classified By: Political-Military Minister-Counselor Marcie Ries for re
asons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is the second in a series of reports on the Sons
of Iraq (SOI), formerly known as Concerned Local Citizens
(CLC). For information regarding the origins, training,
equipment, operations, and the initial prospects for
integration of the former CLC, see Ref A.

¶2. (S) Summary. As of July 2008, the SOI program had grown
to approximately 103,000 members, providing a significant
Iraqi augmentation to security forces in critical areas of
the campaign against the insurgency and Al Qaeda. Around 25%
of the SOI have requested permanent positions in the Iraqi
Security Forces (ISF), though the GOI to date has approached
such integration conservatively. Some Iraqi government and
military leaders remain suspicious of the program, as seen
most recently during planning for ISF operations in Diyala.
The remainder may seek civil employment, but generating the
required number of job opportunities remains a challenge
given the slow rate of job growth in Iraq presently. The
future of the program is shifting towards Iraqi control and
Iraqi responsibility for the SOI's future. End Summary.

ISF integration

¶3. (S REL MCFI) As of July 30, 2008, Multinational Corps-Iraq
(MNC-I) has contracted for a total of 101,319 SOI personnel
in the following provinces:
Ninewa: 2,748
Kirkuk: 11,070
Salah ad Din: 7,205
Diyala: 8,154
Baghdad: 56,087
Anbar: 4,719
Babil: 9,334
Qadisiyah: 2,002

¶4. (S REL MCFI) From February-May 2008, integration of SOI
into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) was slow but steady.
The GOI had what turned out to be well-founded suspicions
that some of the SOI were insurgents, and established a
vetting process to cull bad apples out of the ISF basket.
Constant oversight by MNF-I Force Strategic Engagements Cell
(FSEC) kept the files moving through the process at the GOI's
Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National
Reconciliation (IFCNR), Iraqi intelligence agencies, and the
Ministry of Interior (MoI). IFCNR vetted the personnel files
for errors, and intelligence agencies screened the files for
disqualifying criteria, particularly security concerns. MoI
issued hiring orders. Intelligence screening eliminated
about 7% of applicants. The average time to process a group
of applicants was about 100 days: 25 for IFCNR, 41 for

intelligence, and 35 for MoI. A further constraint was the
limited availability of basic training classes offered by
Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense.

¶5. (S REL MCFI) The process came to a halt in May after PM
Maliki circulated a letter dated May 28 indicating the GOI
had reached the limit it had agreed with CF for SOI-ISF
integration. According to the PM's letter, the GOI had
agreed to integrate 20 percent of SOI out of a maximum 57,000
total hired by CF under the SOI program. The May 28 letter
stopped SOI integration when 12,000 SOI had been integrated
into ISF (just over 20 percent of 57,000). Senior CF leaders
have been pressing the PM on integration of SOI and
transition of program control.

The future of SOI - registration and transfer to Iraqi control
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¶6. (S) MNC-I Commander LTG Austin met with PM Maliki on July
3 to propose turning over responsibility for the program to
the GOI by January 1, 2009. The PM agreed to take over the
contracts for 60,000 SOI. To get SOI numbers down to 60,000,
the PM agreed to hire a further 17,000 SOI into the Iraqi
Police before the end of 2008. That step, combined with the
ongoing transition of 26,000 SOI through CF-funded employment
and training programs, will reduce the number of remaining
SOI contracts to 60,000. MNC-I agreed not to hire new SOI
nor to backfill the successfully transitioned SOI. Several
GOI entities, including IFCNR, the Baghdad Operations Center
(BOC), and the National Security Advisor's office were tasked
by the PM to prepare SOI transition plans to be enacted once
the GOI assumes all SOI contracts later this year. IFCNR

Chairman Mohamed Salman recently presented the plans to PM
Maliki.

¶7. (S) In late July, MG Qanbar Abud, the BOC Commander,
pressed IFCNR to establish a policy for SOI and then to get
out of the way. Abud envisioned a basic policy that the GOI
would assume the SOI payroll, and the BOC would register,
vet, and assist in the SOI's future; the policy would be
executed by BOC and CF commanders, not IFCNR.

¶8. (S) In July 30-31 meetings with IFCNR Chairman Salman, PM
Advisor Dr. Bassima al Sa'adi, and Deputy National Security
Advisor Safa al Shaykh, FSEC and MNC-I identified the
emerging GOI direction: to create a SOI transition
organization. This organization would handle the GOI
assumption of SOI contracts as well as non-security
transition.

Suspicions in some quarters

¶9. (S REL MCFI) Throughout July, tension between SOI members
and program supporters on the one hand, and some GOI
officials and ISF commanders on the other, continued to run
strong in some places. As the ISF prepared for a major new
security operation now kicking off in Diyala, some Diyala
leaders feared the operation would result in violent
suppression of the SOI (Ref D). In mid-July, the GOI
announced a requirement for all SOI to report to local police
stations to be counted and registered as part of the GOI's
plans to assume responsibility for all SOI contracts. The
effort reportedly fed into fears among some SOI in Diyala
Province that the GOI planned to arrest or disarm SOI in
advance of expected ISF operations. In late July, ISF
commanders assured Coalition officers that SOI will not be
targeted in the Diyala operations. IFCNR Chairman Mohamed
Salman told FSEC officers that the GOI's registration effort
was suspended pending delivery of MNC-I's own SOI audit
process.

Civilian training - no guarantee of long-term employment

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¶10. (S) MNF-I has sought to generate civilian employment
opportunities as a long-term solution for reintegrating SOI
and preventing a return to insurgency. Options included
public works programs and vocational-technical training
(VOTECH). These solutions are temporary, however, and
reflect the ongoing problems of unemployment and
underemployment in Iraq (Ref B). Unless these are addressed,
when the programs end the SOI will once again be "on the
street."

¶11. (S) Among the programs providing training for former SOI
members in transition: Civilian Service Corps (CSC), Joint
Technical Education Reintegration Program (JTERP), and
Community Based Workers Program (CBWP). CSC is a MNC-I
initiative to provide skills training and employment. It is
focused on construction tasks. CSC is training over 3,500
trainees on 17 contracts. MNC-I currently uses Commanders'
Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds for this program.
JTERP is an Iraqi-led program with MNC-I support. JTERP
provides education and skills training for released detainees
as well as former SOI members. Attendees are not guaranteed
employment upon completion of the program. JTERP is training
255 former SoI in Pilot Programs in Salah ad Din, Babil, and
Baghdad provinces. Further expansion is planned in August
and September in Salah ad Din, Anbar, and Diyala provinces.
CBWP is Iraqi-led and funded, but it also receives support
from MNC-I's CSC program. The intended effect is to transfer
SOI from security tasks to public works programs.
Concurrently, MNC-I intends to continue using CERP funds for
public works programs of its own.

Comment

¶12. (S) Comment: The road to GOI control of the SOI will
have some bumps. While MNC-I will provide its SOI roster to
the GOI, we expect the GOI will insist on its own
registration, to verify the MNC-I list and ferret out persons
of interest. The GOI will apply Iraqi law to SOI members,
arresting some for suspected criminal activity which may have
occurred either before or during their SOI service. Fearing
arrest, some SOI members will flee rather than register their
names with the Iraqi Police. Meanwhile, other members would
rather quit than work for the GOI. In the end, the key issue
for SOI transition is going to be whether or not SOI find
gainful employment. The GOI will need to recognize that if
they do not want to take more into the security services,
they will have to generate other alternatives.
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